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Azibert et al.

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(54) **SPLIT MECHANICAL FACE SEAL**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 08/992,753, filed on Dec. 17, 1997, now Pat. No. 6,131,912.

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **F16J 15/34**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **277/401; 277/408**

(58) **Field of Search** **277/400, 401, 277/408**

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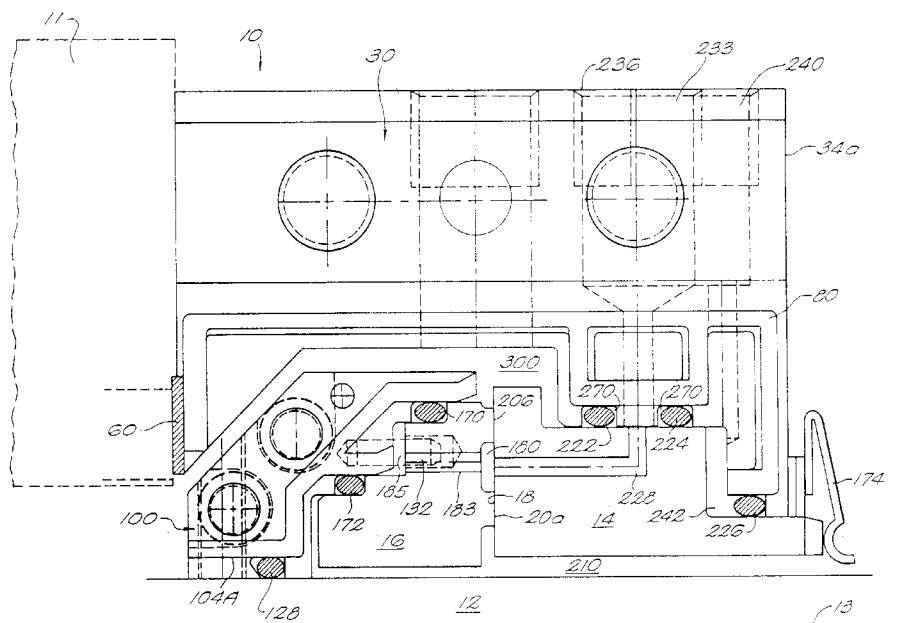
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A split mechanical face seal that provides fluid sealing between a housing and a rotating shaft includes first and second seal rings each having at least two seal ring segments and a radially extending seal face. The seal ring faces of the seal rings are opposed to one another. One of the seal rings is connected to the rotating shaft to rotate therewith, while the other seal ring is connected to the housing. The split seal also includes a continuous, circumferential groove formed in the seal face of the first seal ring for introducing a fluid to the seal faces of the first and second seal rings to establish a seal therebetween. A split support member having at least two support segments for coupling the first seal ring to the housing or the rotating shaft is also provided. The split face seal is operable as both a contacting and a non-contacting mechanical face seal.

7 Claims, 13 Drawing Sheets



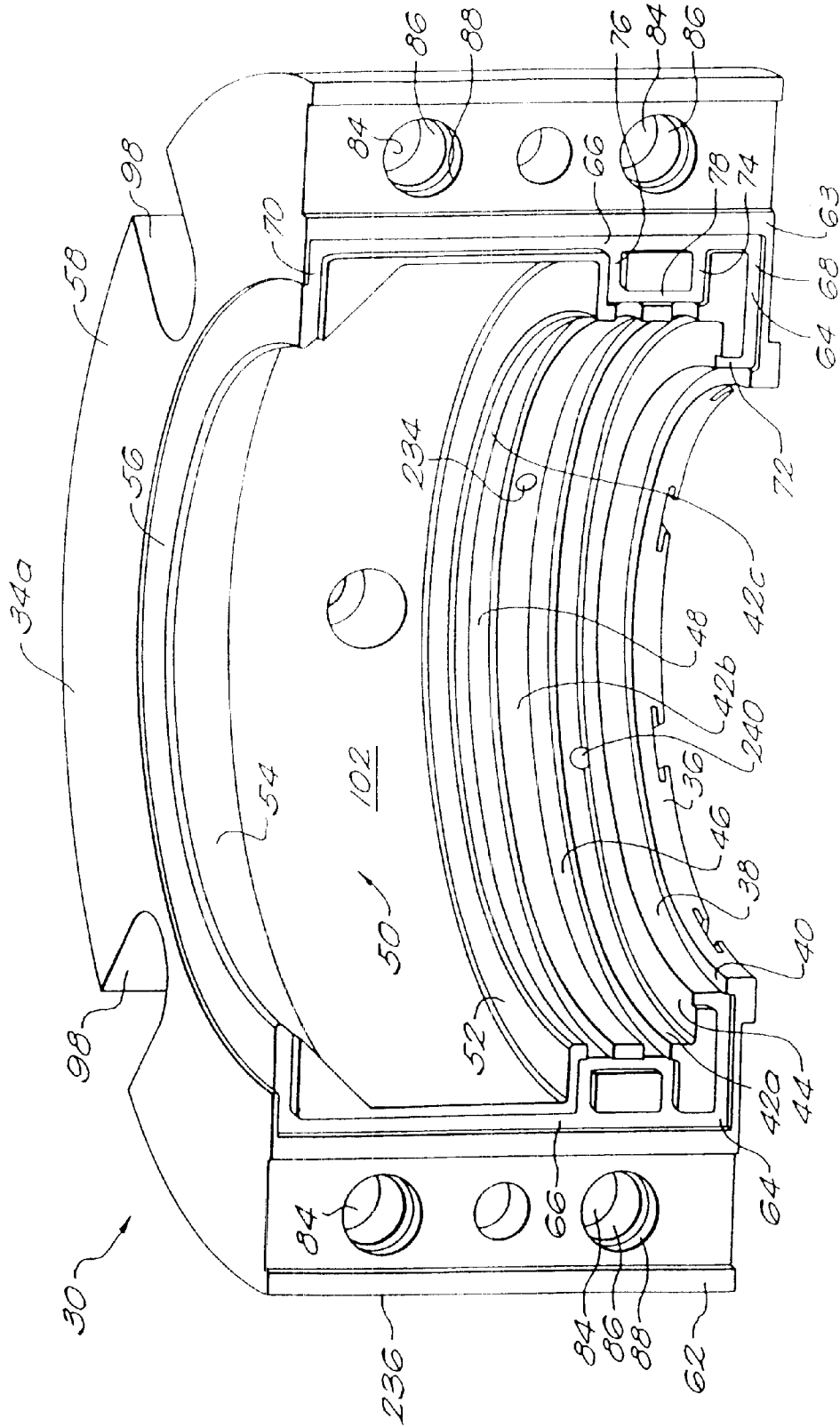


FIG. 2

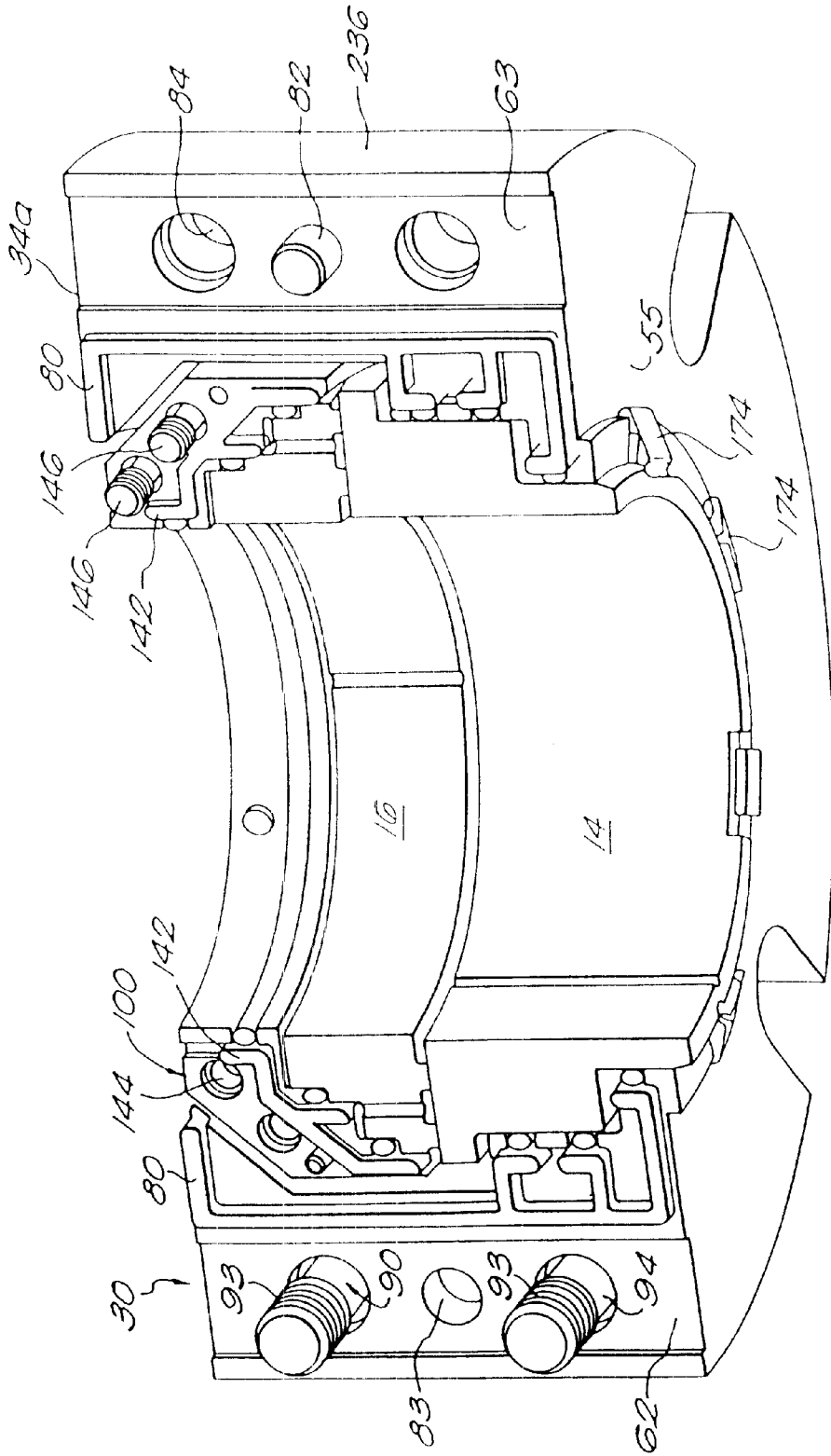


FIG. 3

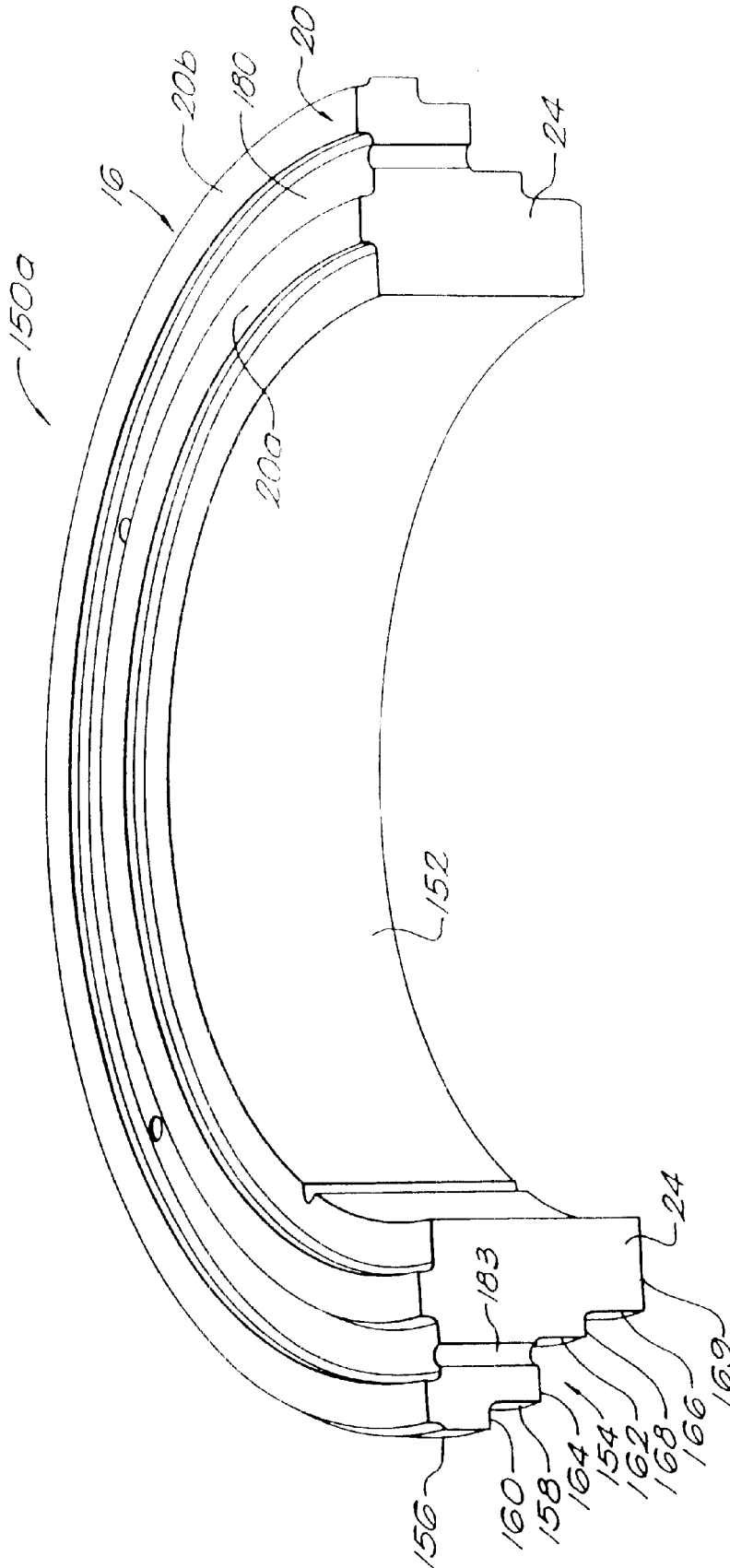


FIG. 4

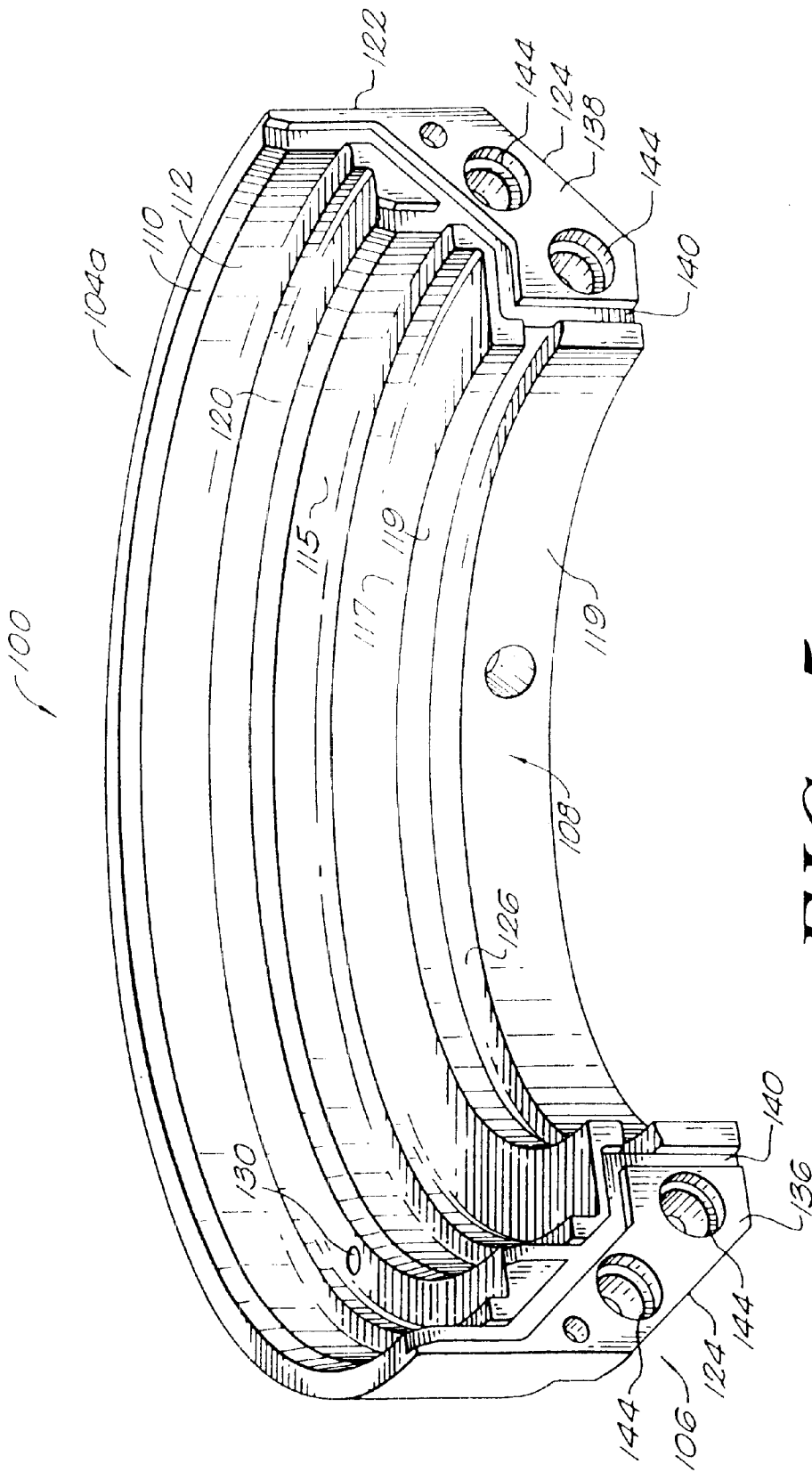


FIG. 5

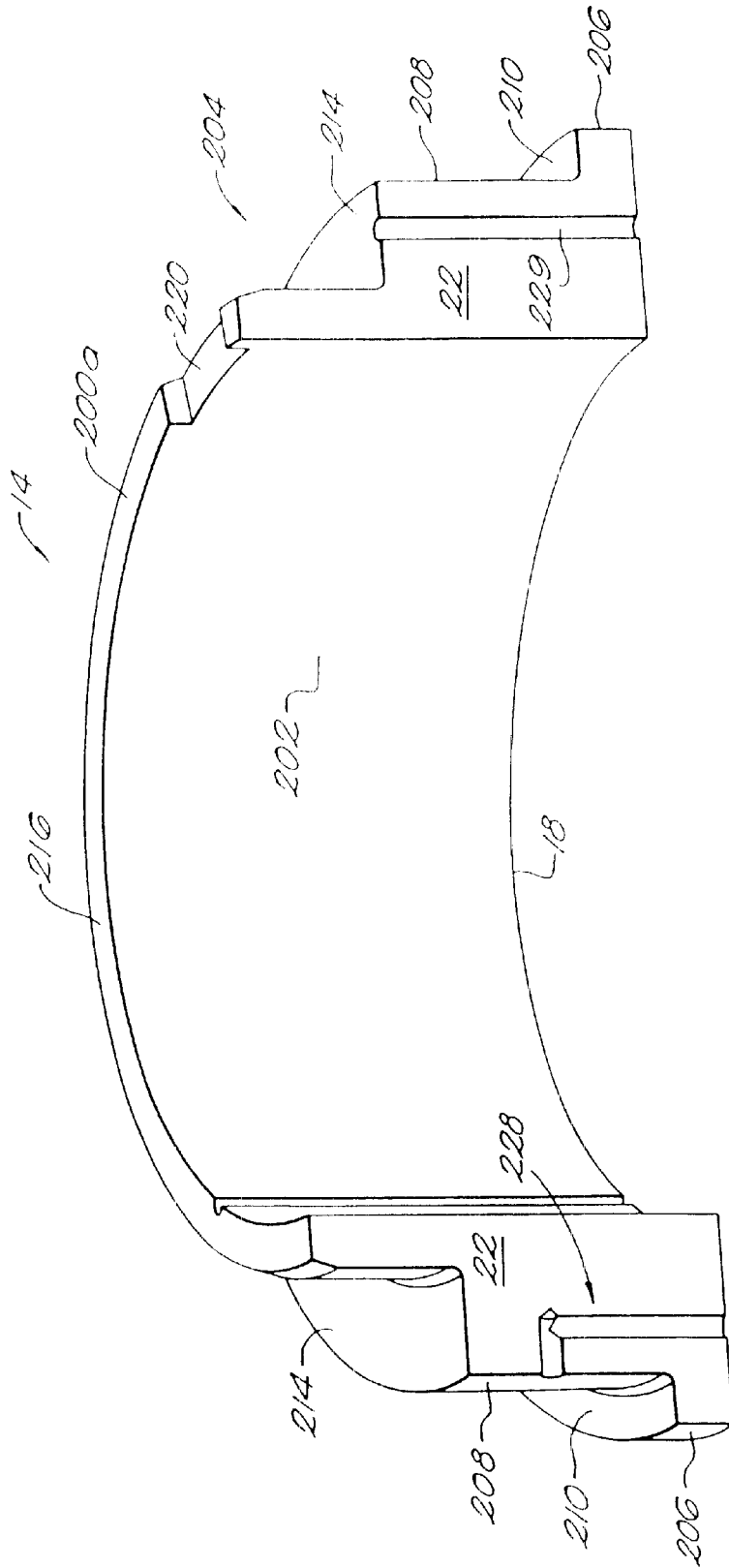


FIG. 6A

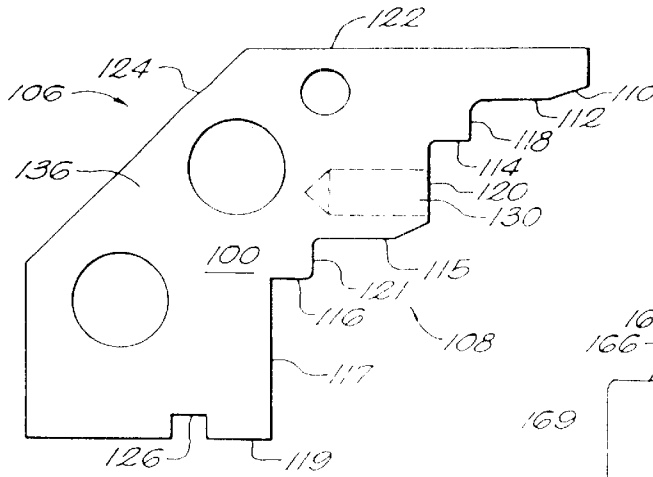


FIG. 9

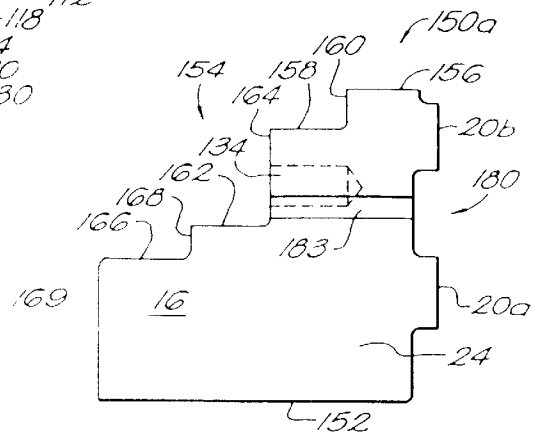


FIG. 10

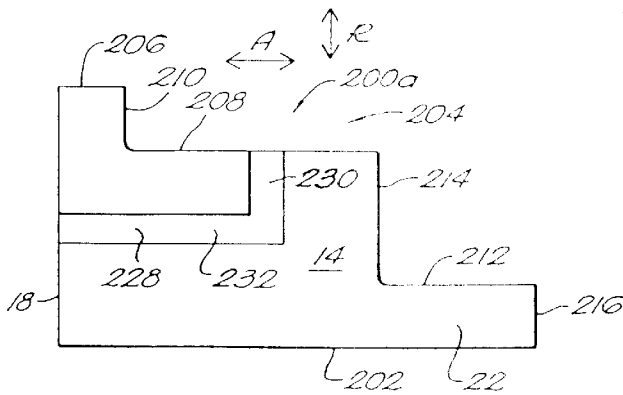


FIG. 11

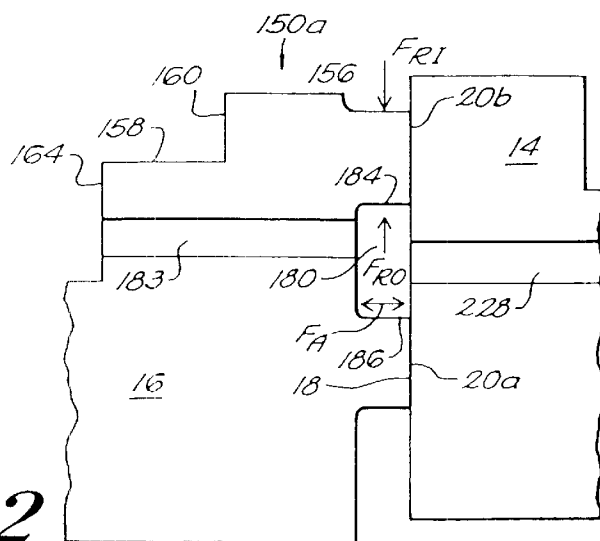


FIG. 12

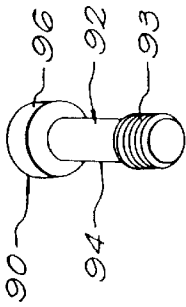


FIG. 7A

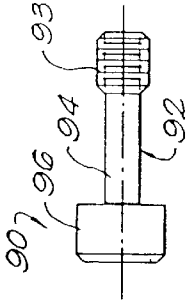


FIG. 7B

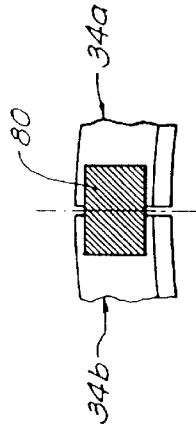


FIG. 8

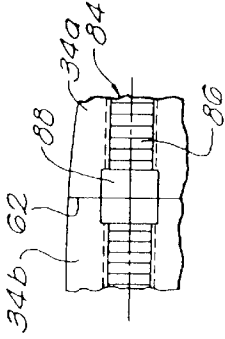


FIG. 18

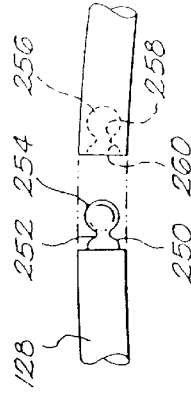


FIG. 14

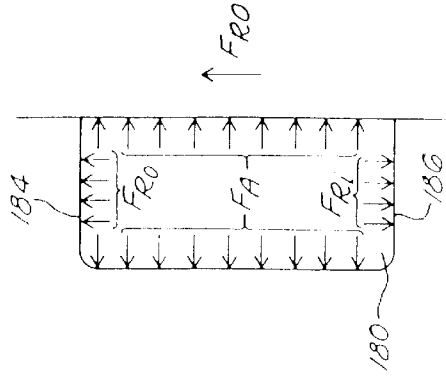


FIG. 13

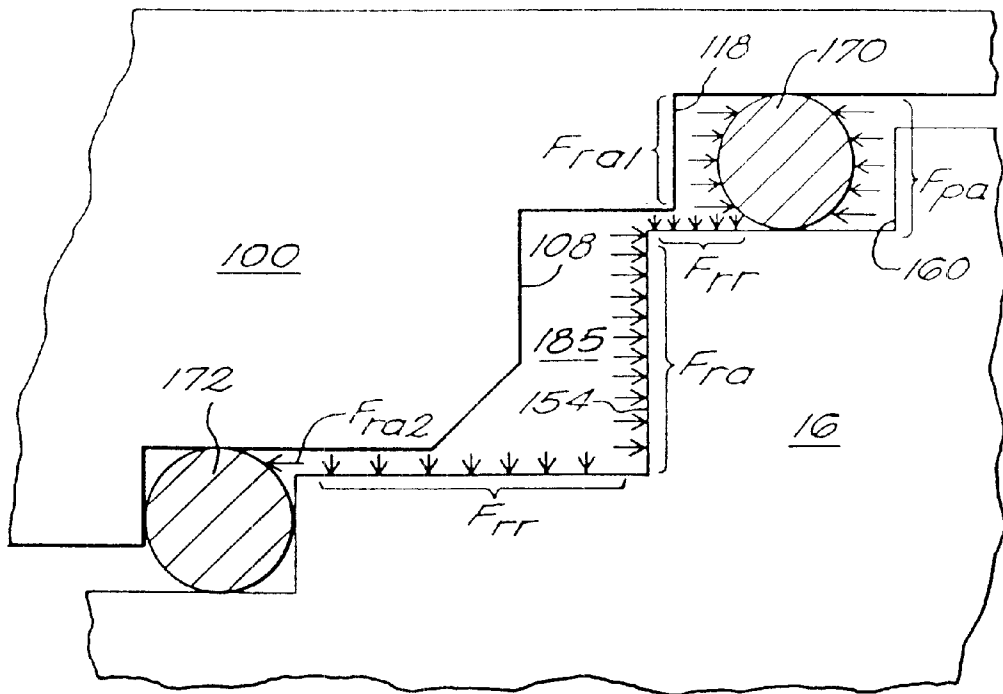


FIG. 15A

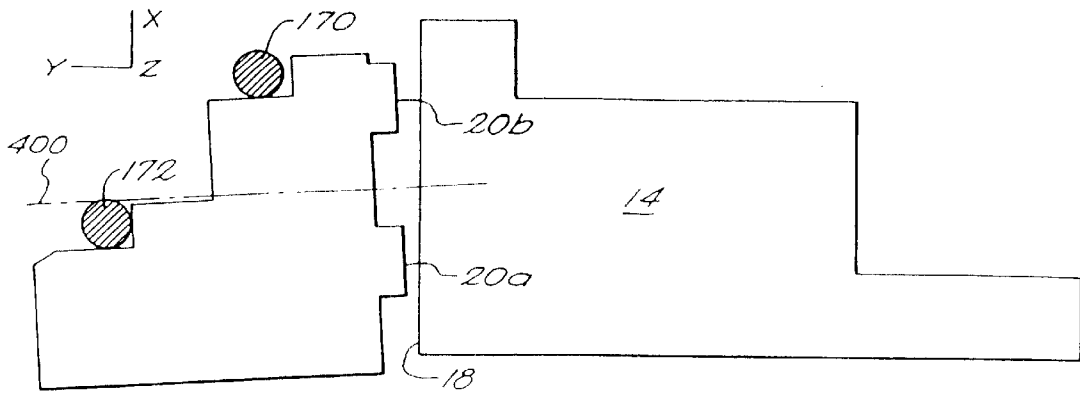


FIG. 17A

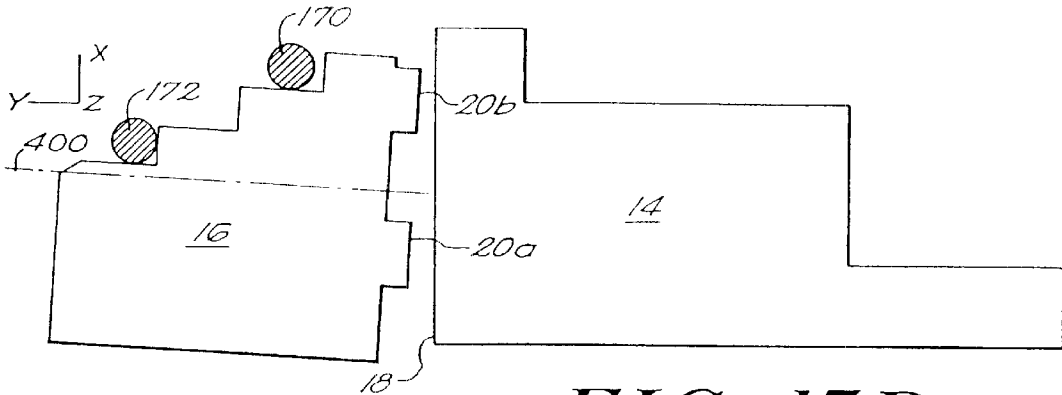


FIG. 17B

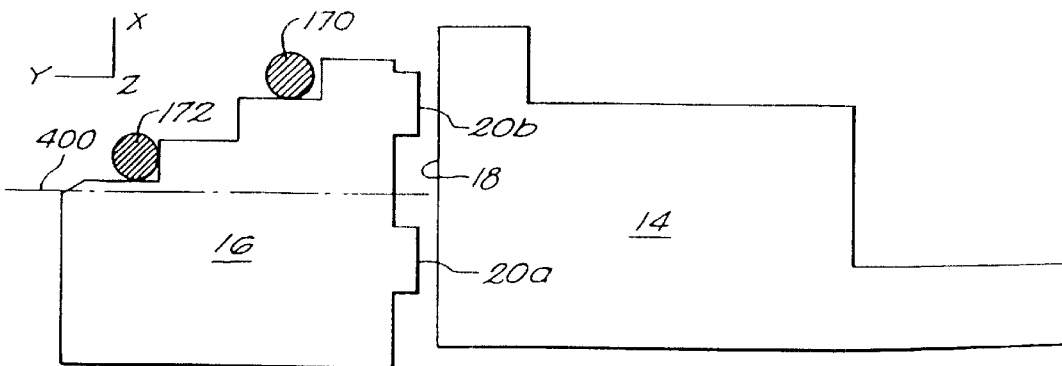


FIG. 17C

SPLIT MECHANICAL FACE SEAL

This application is a continuation application of Ser. No. 08/992,753 filed on Dec. 17, 1997, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,131,912. The contents of the aforementioned application is hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to seals for providing fluid sealing between a housing and a rotating shaft. More particularly, the invention relates to face seals in which a fluid is introduced between portions of the seal faces of the seal.

Conventional mechanical seals are employed in a wide variety of mechanical apparatuses to provide a pressure-tight and fluid-tight seal between a rotating shaft and a stationary housing. The seal is usually positioned about the rotating shaft, which is mounted in and protrudes from the stationary housing. The seal is typically bolted to the housing at the shaft exit, thus preventing loss of pressurized process fluid from the housing. Conventional split mechanical seals include face type mechanical seals, which include a pair of annular sealing rings that are concentrically disposed about the shaft, and axially spaced from each other. The sealing rings each have sealing faces that are biased into physical contact with each other. Usually, one seal ring remains stationary, while the other ring contacts the shaft and rotates therewith. The mechanical seal prevents leakage of the pressurized process fluid to the external environment by biasing the seal ring sealing faces into physical contact with each other. As a result of the repeated physical contact between the faces, abrasion of the seal faces occurs and the seals typically exhibit undesirable wear characteristics and leakage.

The poor wear characteristics of these conventional mechanical face seals necessitate the frequent monitoring and replacement of the seal components, particularly the seal rings. Replacement and repair of damaged seals have been facilitated by seal designs where a portion of the component parts of the mechanical seals are segmented or split. Installation of split or partially split seal components can be performed without necessitating the complete breakdown of the mechanical apparatus and without having to pass the annular seal over an end of the shaft. However, even in split seal designs, significant time is required to replace the seal components, resulting in frequent long periods of down time for the mechanical apparatuses associated with the seal.

The prior art attempted to overcome the above difficulties by employing non-contact mechanical seals that utilize a fluid interposed between the seal ring faces to reduce frictional wear. Conventional mechanical non-contact face seals typically employ spiral type-grooves formed in the hard face of the seal rings to develop a hydrodynamic lifting force that separates the seal faces. The resultant gap allows fluid to be disposed within the gap to prevent abrasion of the seal faces. These types of seals are limited in application because the seals are designed to operate in a unidirectional manner. If the seals are driven in the opposite direction, the seal rings typically do not separate but are pulled or sucked toward each other, thereby increasing wear and ultimately destroying the seals. Other conventional designs employ specially designed spiral grooves that can operate in both directions (bi-directional grooves). These grooves, however, are typically less efficient in separating the seal faces.

Even in mechanical non-contact seal designs a certain amount of seal face abrasion occurs, especially during

start-up or during periods in which the shaft is rotating at relatively low speeds. Such abrasion causing wear of the seal components requires the eventual replacement of the seal components.

Few, if any, split-seal designs have been proposed for non-contacting seals. Difficulties have occurred in developing such a seal design due to the increased number of sealing surfaces in a split seal design and the presence of the fluid between the seal faces. The additional seal surfaces between each of the split segments of the seal components, and especially between the seal ring segments, make it difficult to maintain a fluid tight seal throughout the split seal. In addition, the fluid interposed between the seal faces can exert separation forces on the split seal components which can cause separation of the split components and further fluid leakage. For these reasons, there is a need in the art for a split, non-contact mechanical seal design that can provide a fluid-tight seal, while concomitantly providing the advantage of conventional split-seal designs.

As the above described and other prior art seals have proved less than optimal, an object of the present invention is to provide an improved split mechanical seal in which a fluid can be introduced between the seal faces while maintaining a relatively fluid-tight seal.

Another object of the invention is to provide a split mechanical seal operable under a wide range of operating conditions for a wide range of services.

Still another object of the present invention is to provide a split mechanical seal that is relatively easy to assemble or and to disassemble.

Yet another object of the invention is to provide a split mechanical seal that employs fluid at the seal faces to reduce wear while concomitantly preventing or minimizing leakage at the other faces, without compromising seal performance or integrity.

Other general and more specific objects of this invention will in part be obvious and will in part be evident from the drawings and the description which follow.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

These and other objects are attained by the split mechanical face seal of the present invention in which each of the components of the seal can be split and a barrier fluid can be introduced to the seal faces of the stationary and rotary seal rings. The split mechanical seal of the present invention provides the advantages of a non-contacting seal design, e.g., reduced wear on the seal faces, as well as the advantages of split mechanical seal design, e.g. ease of installation and maintenance, while concomitantly preventing process fluid leakage across the seal surfaces. Additionally, the split mechanical seal of the present invention provides for adjustment of the degree of contact between portions of the seal faces and the flexibility and advantage of being suitable for gas or liquid barrier fluids applications, as well as for multiple environments.

The invention provides a split mechanical face seal that provides fluid sealing between a housing and a rotating shaft and includes first and second seal rings each having at least two seal ring segments and a radially extending seal face. The seal ring faces of the seal rings are opposed to one another. One of the seal rings is connected to and rotates with the rotating shaft, while the other seal ring is connected to the housing. The split mechanical seal also includes means for introducing a fluid to the seal faces of the first and second seal rings for establishing a seal therebetween and a split support member having at least two support segments for connecting the first seal ring to the housing or the rotating shaft.

The split support member can optionally include a split gland assembly having at least two gland segments that sealingly engage an outer surface of the first seal ring and connect the first seal ring to the housing. The split support member can also include at least one split resilient member, such as a split O-ring, interposed between the split gland assembly and the outer surface of the first seal ring for resiliently supporting the first seal ring in the radial direction.

The split seal can also optionally include a split holder assembly having at least two holder segments for connecting the second seal ring to the rotating shaft. At least one split resilient member, such as a split O-ring, can be interposed between the split holder assembly and the outer surface of the second seal ring. The split resilient member can resiliently support the second seal ring in the radial direction and the axial direction.

The split resilient member can also be positioned to permit pivoting of the second seal ring about the split resilient member to maintain co-planar alignment of the first seal face and the second seal face with respect to each other. In this manner coning of the seal faces, i.e., contact of the seal faces at either the outer or inner diameter of the seal rings due to pressure distortion of the seal rings, is controlled and the seal faces are maintained in a co-planar relationship.

The split seal can include a split shaft sealing member, such as a split O-ring, positioned between the rotating shaft and the split holder assembly. The split shaft sealing member provides a fluid seal between the shaft and the split holder assembly.

The means for introducing a barrier fluid can be a groove formed in the first seal face. The groove can be continuous about the first seal face and can be positioned to form two concentric seal faces on the first seal face thereby providing a dual seal. A continuous, circumferential groove can also be positioned on the first seal face to form lands on both sides of the circumferential groove. The barrier fluid can be a gas or a liquid or a combination thereof. In conjunction with other factors, such as the pressure of the barrier fluid, the groove can be dimensioned such that the barrier fluid within the groove provides a primarily hydrostatic force on the first and second seal faces to cause separation of at least a portion of the first seal face from at least a portion of the second seal face.

The means for introducing a barrier fluid to the first and second seal faces can include a fluid conduit formed through the first seal ring. The fluid conduit can have an opening at the first seal face and can extend substantially axially through the first seal ring to open at the outer surface of the first seal ring. A second fluid conduit can be formed in the split support member. The second fluid conduit can be positioned proximate to and in fluid communication with the fluid conduit formed in the first seal ring.

The split seal can optionally include a system for introducing a closing fluid to a rear surface of the first seal ring. The closing fluid exerts a closing force on the first seal ring that biases the first and second sealing faces towards one another into a sealing relationship. The system for introducing a closing fluid can be a fluid conduit formed in the split support member. The fluid conduit can have an opening proximate the rear surface of the first seal ring to facilitate the introduction of the closing fluid to the rear surface.

The split seal can also include a system for fluidly retaining the seal ring segments of the first seal ring in a sealing relationship in a negative pressure condition. The system for fluidly retaining the seal ring segments of the first

seal ring in a sealing relationship can include a fluid conduit formed in the first seal ring for supplying barrier fluid to the outer surface of the first seal ring. The fluid conduit can have an opening in fluid communication with the means for introducing barrier fluid to the first and second seal faces.

The split support member can include a split holder assembly having at least two holder segments for radially supporting the first seal ring and connecting the first seal ring to the rotating shaft. The split seal can also include a gland assembly that sealingly engages the outer surface of the second seal ring and connects the second seal ring to the housing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be more fully understood by reference to the following detailed description in conjunction with the attached drawings in which like reference numerals refer to like elements through the different views. The drawings illustrate principals of the invention and, although not to scale, show relative dimensions.

FIG. 1 is a fragmentary view in cross-section of a split mechanical seal, illustrating the structure for introducing a fluid to the seal faces according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of one-half of the gland-assembly of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of one-half of the assembled split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of one-half of the rotary seal ring of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of one-half of the rotary seal ring holder assembly of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of one-half of the stationary seal ring of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 6A is a perspective view of one-half of the stationary seal ring of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1, illustrating an alternative arrangement of the fluid bores formed in the stationary seal ring;

FIG. 7A is a perspective view of a gland or holder assembly screw according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 7B is a side elevational view of the screw of FIG. 7A;

FIG. 8 is a top fragmentary view of the gland assembly of the split seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a side elevational view of a face of a rotary seal ring holder segment of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 10 is a side elevational view of a face of a rotary seal ring segment of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 11 is a side elevational view of a stationary seal ring segment of the split seal of FIG. 1 according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 12 is a side elevational view of a stationary seal ring segment and a rotary seal ring segment of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 illustrating the separate force that develop

within the seal ring groove according to the teachings of the present invention;

FIG. 13 is a fragmentary side elevational view of the seal ring faces of the split seal shown in FIG. 12 further illustrating the forces within the groove according to the present invention;

FIG. 14 is a sectional view of an elastomeric member according to the present invention;

FIG. 15 is a fragmentary view in cross-section of the split mechanical seal shown in FIG. 1 according to the present invention;

FIG. 15A is a fragmentary view in cross-section of the holder assembly and the rotary seal ring of the split mechanical seal shown in FIG. 1 according to the present invention;

FIG. 16 is an exploded unassembled view of the seal components of FIG. 3 according to the present invention;

FIGS. 17A–C are side elevational views in cross-section of the stationary seal ring segment and the rotary seal ring segment of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 illustrating pivoting of the rotary seal ring; and

FIG. 18 is a broken, side elevational view of the gland assembly of the split mechanical seal of FIG. 1 illustrating the fastener apertures formed therein according to the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATED EMBODIMENT

A split mechanical face seal 10 in accordance with the present invention is shown in FIGS. 1 and 16. The mechanical seal 10 is also described in co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/992,751, filed on Dec. 17, 1997, and entitled “Split Mechanical Face Seal with Negative Pressure Control System,” now U.S. Pat. No. 6,068,264; co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/992,611, filed on Dec. 17, 1997, and entitled “Split Mechanical Face Seal With Seal Face Fluid Introducing Structure,” now U.S. Pat. No. 6,059,293; and co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/992,613, filed on Dec. 17, 1997, and entitled “Split Mechanical Face Seal With Resilient Pivoting Member,” now U.S. Pat. No. 6,068,263, all of which are incorporated herein by reference. The mechanical seal 10 is preferably concentrically disposed about a shaft 12 and is secured to an external wall of a housing 11, such as a pump or the like. The shaft 12 extends along an axis 13, and is mounted, at least partially, in the housing 11. The seal 10 is constructed to provide fluid sealing between housing 11 and shaft 12, thereby preventing a process medium from escaping the housing 11. Fluid sealing is achieved by a stationary seal ring 14 and a rotary seal ring 16, each ring having a radially extending arcuate seal face 20, 18 and a pair of segment seating surfaces 22 and 24, as shown in FIGS. 4, 6, and 16. The seal face 18 of seal ring 14 is biased into a sealing relationship with the seal face 20 of seal ring 16, as described in greater detail below. In addition, the segment seating surfaces 22, 24 of each seal ring are biased into sealing engagement with each other. This, these individual seal surfaces provide a fluid seal operable under a wide range of operating conditions and in a wide range of services, as described in greater detail below.

The terms “process medium” and “process fluid” used herein generally refer to the medium or fluid being transferred through the housing 11. In pump applications, for example, the process medium is the fluid being pumped through the pump housing.

The terms “axial” and “axially” used herein refer to a direction generally parallel to shaft axis 13. The terms

“radial” and “radially” used herein refer to a direction generally perpendicular to shaft axis 13.

The split mechanical seal 10 is preferably a split mechanical non-contacting-type face seal in which a barrier fluid is introduced between the seal faces 18, 20 of the first and second seal rings 14, 16, respectively. In a non-contacting-type face seal the barrier fluid acts to minimize, inhibit, or prevent contact between substantial radial portions of the seal face 18 and radial portions of the seal face 20, thereby reducing the frictional engagement and the resulting wear of the seal faces 18, 20. Accordingly, a non-contacting-type face seal includes seal designs in which there is total separation of the seal faces at all times, total separation of the seal faces under certain conditions, i.e., during periods of shaft rotation, and occasional or partial separation of the seal faces. In contrast, a contacting-type face seal includes seal designs in which partial or complete contact of the seal faces is maintained. In both type of seals, the barrier fluid functions as a heat transfer medium to transfer heat away from the seal faces to reduce the effects of thermal stress on the seal faces.

The barrier fluid used with the present seal can be a gas or a liquid or a combination of both. Typically, the area of the seal faces that remains in frictional contact is greater in barrier liquid applications than in barrier gas applications. Accordingly, the use of a barrier gas can result in less frictional wear on the seal faces 18, 20 relative to the use of barrier liquid. A gas barrier fluid, however, is not suitable for all applications due to the slight amount of leakage of the barrier gas into the process medium that will occur. The use of barrier liquid in the seal can provide increased reduction of the effects of thermal stress due to the typically better heat transfer properties of a liquid compared to a gas. One skilled in the art will appreciate that the choice of one fluid medium over another is dependent on the type of service in which the seal is used. For example, in applications in which a minimal amount of barrier gas leakage is acceptable, a barrier gas may be preferred to reduce wear at the seal faces and to increase the life of the seal. In services in which the presence of a minimal amount of barrier gas within the process medium is undesirable, a liquid seal may be preferable.

Accordingly, the seal of the present invention provides the flexibility and the unique advantage of being suitable for both gas or liquid (or combinations thereof) barrier fluid applications. In addition, many of the features of the mechanical seal of the present invention, as described herein, are suitable for use in traditional mechanical (i.e., contacting) face seal applications as well as non-contacting face seal applications. As such, the seal of the present invention is not solely limited to a non-contact-type seal arrangement (e.g., a gas seal), but enjoys the unique advantages of both conventional split mechanical seals and conventional gas seals in a simple but elegant seal design.

With reference to FIGS. 1 through 3 and 16, the illustrated split mechanical seal 10 includes, in addition to the stationary seal ring 14 and the rotary seal ring 16, a seal gland assembly 30 and a rotary seal ring holder assembly 100. The seal gland assembly 30 includes a pair of identical gland segments or halves 34a and 34b, one of which is shown in FIG. 2. The gland segment 34a has, starting from the axial outermost end (the bottom of FIG. 2), an inner surface that includes an axially extending first surface 36 and an integrally formed and axially extending second surface 38 that is radially stepped from the first surface 36. The first surface 36 and the second surface 38 form in combination therewith a first annular connecting wall 40. An axially extending third surface 42 is radially stepped from the second surface 38 and

forms, in combination therewith, a second annular connection wall **44**. The third surface **42** is axially segmented into three sections **42a**, **42b**, and **42c** by elastomeric receiving channels **46** and **48**, each of which is radially stepped from the third surface **42**. An axially extending fourth surface **50** is radially stepped from the third surface **42** by a third annular connection wall **52**. A sloped fifth surface **54** extends radially inward and axially outwardly from the gland segment fourth surface **50**.

The gland assembly **30** has a housing gasket groove **56** formed along a bottom **58** of the gland assembly **30**. The groove **56** seats a flat, annular elastomeric gasket **60** that preferably has an axial dimension greater than the depth of the groove **56**, thereby providing a pressure-tight and fluid-tight seal between the mechanical seal **10** and the housing **11**. In a preferred embodiment, the housing gasket **60** is pre-cut into two arcuate segments for mounting in each gland segment **34a**, **34b**. The housing gasket segments are preferably mounted in the groove **56** and secured thereto by an adhesive. This arrangement helps to prevent leakage of the process medium along the mating portions of the mechanical seal **10** and the housing **11** when mounted together.

Each axially extending gland seal surface **62**, **63** has formed therein a gland gasket groove **64**. The groove **64** has a main axial portion **66** which extends from the gland second surface **38** to the gland gasket groove **56**. Groove segments **68** and **70**, transverse to the main groove segment **66**, extend to the second surface **38** and the gland gasket groove **56**, respectively, and groove segment **72**, spaced radially inward from main groove segment **66**, extends along the second seal surface **38**. A pair of internal transverse groove segments **74** and **76** extend transversely from main groove segment **66** to third gland surface **42**, and groove segment **78**, spaced radially inward from main groove segment **66**, extends parallel to the third gland surface **42** to connect transverse groove segments **74** and **76**.

Referring to FIGS. **1** and **3**, an elastomeric gland gasket **80**, complementary in shape to gland groove **66**, seats in the groove. The gasket **80** extends beyond the split gland seal surfaces **62**, **63** when seated in groove **66**, as best shown in FIGS. **3** and **8**. The exposed portion of the gasket **80** is captured in a complementary groove formed on the split gland seal face of the other gland segment **34b**. Capturing both ends of the gasket **80** between the gland seal surfaces **62**, **63** prevents the gasket **80** from extruding into the gap formed between the split gland seal surfaces when subject to pressures higher than a selected maximum pressure. This double-capturing features allows the gland segments to withstand greater pressures without developing pressure leaks, as well as relaxing the mechanical tolerances of other components of the seal **10**. The gland gasket **80** can be formed from any suitable resilient material, such as elastomeric rubber. Further, although the gasket **80** preferably has the illustrated shape, those of ordinary skill will recognize that the gasket **80** and its corresponding groove **66** can have any suitable geometric configuration.

With reference to FIGS. **2** and **3**, each of the gland seal surfaces **62** and **63** has pair of fastener receiving apertures **84** formed therein. The apertures **84** have a tapped smaller-diameter portion **86**, and a concentric untapped larger-diameter portion **88**. Preferably, the untapped portion **88** of the aperture **84** is disposed closest to the gland seal surfaces **62**, **63**. An alignment pin **82** extends from gland seal surface **63** and is received in an alignment aperture **83** formed in the seal surface of the other gland segment. The alignment pin **82** serves to ensure a somewhat proper alignment of the

gland seal surfaces **63**, **64** of the gland seal segments **34a** and **34b** when assembled.

The apertures **84** mount screws **90** having the configuration illustrated in FIGS. **7A** and **7B**. The screw **90** preferably has a main shaft **92** and a screw-head portion **96**. The screw shaft **92** has a threaded distal portion **93** and an untapped proximate portion **94**. The outer diameter of the threaded portion **93** is greater than the outer diameter of the proximal portion **94**. As illustrated in FIG. **18**, each screw **90** fastens together a pair of gland segments **34a** and **34b**. When the threaded distal portion **93** of the screw **90** is screwed into the tapped portion **86** of the aperture **84**, the distal portion **93** is positively maintained in the aperture **84**. As the screw **90** further travels through the aperture **84**, the screw distal end enters the untapped portion **88**, or clearance gap of the aperture **84**. In this orientation, the screw **90**, although not snugly secured, is still positively maintained (i.e., is not detachable) in the aperture **84**. In a preferred embodiment, the diameter of the distalthreaded portion **93** mates with the diameter of the tapped smaller-diameter portion **86**.

The illustrated configuration of the screw **90** and the aperture **84** of the present invention provide significant advantages. In particular, the screw **90** can be mounted in the fastener-receiving aperture **84** from either side of the gland segments **34a**, **34b** prior to assembly, which is particularly useful in limited access installations, and is positively maintained in the gland segment. Preventing the screw **90** from completely detaching from the gland segment prevents accidental loss of the screw **90** during assembly and disassembly, thus facilitating assembly of the seal while reducing installation time.

Each of the gland segments include two fastener recesses **98** to accommodate bolts (not shown) to mount mechanical seal **10** of the invention to the housing **11**. Alternatively, bolt-tabs may be provided about the periphery of the seal **10** to facilitate connection of the seal **10** to the housing **11**. Examples of suitable bolt tabs are shown in U.S. Pat. No. 5,209,496 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,571,268, both of which are assigned to the assignee hereof and are incorporated herein by reference.

As illustrated in FIGS. **1**, **3**, **5**, and **9**, a holder assembly **100** is disposed in a chamber **102**, shown in FIG. **2**, formed in gland assembly **30** and is spaced radially inward therefrom. It should be understood, however, that the holder assembly **100** need not be disposed within the gland assembly **30**. The holder assembly **100** has a pair of identical arcuate holder segments **104a** and **104b**, one of which is shown in FIG. **5**. As shown in FIGS. **5** and **9**, each holder segment includes an outer surface **106** and an inner surface **108**. The holder segment inner surface **108** has a radially inward sloping first surface **110** that terminates in an axially extending second surface **112**. A pair of successive radially inwardly stepped surfaces form a third surface **114** and a fourth surface **115**, respectively. The second surface **112** and the third surface **114** have a radially inward extending first wall **118** integrally formed therebetween, and the third surface **114** and the fourth surface **115** have a radially inward extending second wall **120** integrally formed therebetween. A further pair of successive radially inwardly stepped surfaces form a fifth surface **116** and a sixth surface **119**, respectively. The fourth surface **115** and the fifth surface **116** have a radially inward extending third wall **121** integrally formed therebetween, and the fifth surface **116** and the sixth surface **119** have a radially inward extending fourth wall **117** integrally formed therebetween. The diameter of the sixth surface **119** is preferably equal to or slightly greater than the diameter of the shaft **12**, to which the holder assembly **100** is to be attached.

The holder segment outer surface **106** has a first axially extending outer surface **122** and a radially inward sloping second outer surface **124**. In a preferred embodiment, the outer diameter of the holder segment first outer surface **124** is less than the diameter of the gland segment fourth surface **50**. This clearance allows the holder assembly **100** to seat within the gland assembly **30** for unobstructed rotational movement therein. The outer diameter of the second outer surface **124** is preferably less than the inner diameter of the gland segment fifth surface **54**, and preferably greater than the gland segment third surface **42**.

The sixth face **119** of the holder segment **104a** has formed thereon an annular channel **126** for mounting a split shaft gasket **128**. When mounted in the channel **126**, the gasket **128** sealingly mates with the shaft **12**, providing a fluid-tight seal along the holder and shaft interface (see FIG. 1). The second wall **120** preferably has formed therein a cylindrical alignment bore **130** for receiving one end of an alignment pin **132** (FIG. 1). The other end of the alignment pin **132** is received in a corresponding bore **134** in the rotary seal ring **16**. The protrusion **132** operates as a mechanical rotary means by biasing the rotary seal ring **16** into rotational movement, as described in greater detail below.

The illustrated holder segments **104a**, **104b** have a holder gasket groove **140**, having the configuration illustrated in FIG. 5, formed on each split holder seal face **136**, **138**. A holder gasket **142**, complementary in shape to the groove **140**, seats in groove **140**. The holder gasket **142**, when seated in the groove **140**, extends beyond the holder seal faces **136**, **138**, as best shown in FIG. 3. The exposed portion of the gasket **142** seats in a complementary groove formed in the opposite holder segment seal face. This arrangement provides for a fluid-tight seal at pressures higher than a selected value, as described above. The gasket can be composed of any suitable deformable material, such as elastomeric rubber.

Each of the holder segments **104a**, **104b** have a pair of fastener-receiving apertures **144** that mount screws **146** (FIG. 16). The holder apertures **144** are similar to the fastener-receiving apertures **84** of the gland segments **34a**, **34b** and likewise screws **146** are similar to screws **90**. Advantageously, the screws **146** and apertures **144** operate in the aforementioned manner.

The holder assembly **100**, the gland assembly **30**, and the screws **90** and **146** can be formed from any suitably rigid material, such as, for example, stainless steel.

With reference to FIGS. 4 and 10, the rotary seal ring assembly **16** includes a pair of arcuate rotary seal ring segments **150a** and **150b**, one of which is shown in FIG. 4. The rotary seal ring segments have a substantially smooth arcuate inner surface **152**. The inner diameter of the inner surface **152** of the rotary seal segments is greater than the diameter of the shaft **12** to permit mounting thereon.

The rotary seal segments outer surface **154** has a series of axially extending outer surfaces each of which is stepped radially inward from the other. An axially extending second outer surface **158** is stepped radially inwardly from a first axial extending outer surface **156**. The first outer surface **156** and the second outer surface **158** form in combination therewith a first annular connecting wall **160** that extends radially between the first and second outer surfaces. A third axial extending outer surface **162** is stepped radially inward from the second outer surface **158** by a second annular connecting wall **164** that extends radially between the second and third outer surfaces. A fourth axially extending outer surface **166** is stepped radially inward from the third outer

surface **162**. The third outer surface **162** and the fourth outer surface **166** form in combination a third annular connecting wall **168** that extends radially between the third and fourth outer surfaces. A fourth annular connecting wall **169** extends radially from the fourth outer surface **166** to the inner surface **152**.

The stepped outer surface **154** of the rotary seal segments are complementary to the stepped inner surface **108** of the holder segments **104a**, **104b** to permit mounting of the rotary seal segments into the holder segments. The diameter of the rotary seal segment fourth outer surface **166** is less than the diameter of the holder segment fifth surface **116**. Likewise, the diameters of the rotary seal segment second outer surface **158** and the third outer surface **162** are less than the diameters of the holder segment third surface **114** and fourth surface **115**, respectively.

Elastomeric members, such as split O-rings **170** and **172**, can be concentrically disposed about the rotary seal ring **16**. In a preferred embodiment, the O-ring **170** seats along holder segment second surface **112** and rotary seal segment second outer surface **158** and can selectively abut either first connecting wall **160** or holder segment first wall **118**, as shown in FIGS. 1, 9, 10 and 15A. The O-ring **172** seats along the holder segment fourth surface **115** and third wall **121** and abuts rotary seal segment fourth outer surface **166** and third connecting wall **168**. The O-rings **170** and **172** are sufficiently resilient to place each of the rotary segment sealing surfaces **24** into sealing contact with the corresponding seal ring segment, thereby forming a fluid-tight and pressure-tight seal. The O-rings **170** and **172** function to apply, in combination with the process fluid, a radially inward force that resiliently biases the axial seal surfaces **24** of the rotor segments together thereby preventing or minimizing leakage through the seal faces. In addition, the O-ring **172** applies axial support to the rotary seal ring **16** to inhibit axial motion of the rotary seal ring **16**.

Fluid pressure variations between the seal faces **18** and **20**, as well as at the outer and inner diameter surfaces of the seal faces, can result in distortion of the seal faces **18** and **20a**, **b**. This type of distortion can cause coning of the seal faces. The term "coning" refers to the deflection of one of the seal faces in a manner that causes the two seal faces to depart from a co-planar relationship. Coning typically results in unwanted seal face contact at either the outer or the inner diameter of the seal rings.

To prevent coning, the O-ring **172** is positioned along the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments **150a** and **150b** at a location approximately along axis **400** passing through the rotary seal ring **16**, as illustrated in FIG. 17C. In this position, the O-ring **172** acts as a resilient pivoting member about which the rotary seal ring can pivot. The pivoting action of the O-ring **172** operates to maintain the seal faces **18** and **20** in co-planar alignment.

FIGS. 17A and 17B illustrates in exaggerated form the effects of coning on the rotary seal ring seal face **20** when the O-ring **172** is positioned at a position other than along the axis **400**. The specific location of axis **400**, and thus O-ring **172**, is dependent upon a number of factors, such as the magnitude of the fluid pressure forces on the rotary seal ring and the specific dimensions of the seal ring. The location of axis **400** for a particular seal ring configuration can be readily determined by one skilled in the art using conventional finite element analysis techniques. In FIG. 17A, pressure distortions at the seal faces **18** and **20a**, **b** cause the inner diameter portion of the rotary seal face portion **20a** to deflect toward the stationary seal ring seal face **18** and the

outer diameter portion of seal face portion **20b** to deflect away from seal face **18**. In FIG. 17A, the O-ring **172** is positioned radially inward from the axis **400**. Conversely, in FIG. 17B, the O-ring **172** is positioned radially outward from the axis **400**. Thus, pressure distortions at the seal faces **18** and **20a,b** cause the outer diameter portion of seal face portion **20b** to deflect toward seal face **18** and the inner diameter portion of the seal face portion **20a** to deflect away from the seal face **18**.

The pivoting action of the O-ring **172** provides for a resilient pivoting of the seal face **20** during full operation of the split mechanical seal **10** in both non-contacting and contacting face seal modes, while concomitantly ensuring either consistent co-planar contact between the opposed seal faces or maintenance of a predetermined gap size between these faces.

Those skilled in the art will recognize that the O-rings **170** and **172** are not limited to the specific positions described herein. Alternate positions are possible, including, but not limited to, seating the pivoting resilient member (O-ring **172**) at a rear surface of the stator seal ring **14** to provide a similar seal face alignment function.

The illustrated seal face **20** of the rotary seal ring segments has a continuous, arcuate circumferential groove **180** formed therein, as is best shown in FIG. 4. In a preferred embodiment, the groove **180** is radially disposed between the inner surface **152** and the first outer surface **156** of the rotary seal ring **16**. The groove **180** accordingly splits the rotary seal ring seal face **20** into two concentric seal faces or land portions **20a** and **20b**. In this manner a dual seal is formed between the stationary seal ring **14** and the rotary seal ring **16**.

With reference to FIGS. 1, 12 and 13, the groove **180** communicates with the seal face **18** of the stator seal ring **14**. A barrier fluid at a specified regulated pressure, generally greater than the process pressure, is introduced to the groove **180** through barrier fluid conduits **228** formed in the stator seal ring **14**, as is described in further detail below. The barrier fluid acts to provide a separation force to the seal faces **18** and **20**, as indicated by the arrows labeled F_A in FIGS. 12 and 13. The separation force is a primarily hydrostatic force that operates to minimize, inhibit, or prevent contact between radial portions of the seal face **18** and radial portions of the seal faces **20a** and **20b**, thereby reducing the frictional engagement and the resulting wearing of the seal faces **18**, **20a**, **20b**. The magnitude of the separation force is dependent on a number of factors, such as, for example, the dimensions of the groove, e.g., axial depth and radial width, the configuration of the seal faces, the size of the conduit **228**, as well as the pressure of the barrier fluid. The choice of barrier fluid is also a factor when selecting the magnitude of the separation force and the degree of seal face separation. In applications in which the barrier fluid is a gas, less seal face contact is desirable and, thus, a greater degree of seal face separation is preferred. In barrier liquid applications, a smaller degree of seal face separation is required due to the increased heat transfer properties of a liquid compared to a gas.

A significant advantage of the split mechanical seal **10** of the present invention is that it allows for the introduction of a cooling or barrier fluid to the seal faces **18**, **20** of the seal rings **14**, **16**. A further advantage of the seal of the present invention is that the seal can operate with either a gas or liquid by adjusting the degree of seal face contact, as well as the size of the gap formed between the seal faces **18** and **20**. When a liquid is used, the seal can revert to a conventional

balance arrangement to operate as a conventional contacting mechanical face seal. Conversely, when a gas is used, the seal operates as a non-contacting mechanical face seal in which the seal faces are partially or completely separated. When operating in the non-contact mode, the degree of seal face contact, i.e., the magnitude of the gap between the seal faces, can be controlled and balanced by a closing fluid system, as described below, operating in combination with the O-ring **172**, as well as, by adjusting the barrier fluid pressure at the groove **180**. Thus, the groove **180** and the axial bores **228**, in combination with these other features, allow convenient operation of the split mechanical seal in both non-contacting and contacting modes of operation, without regard to promoting leakage through the seal surfaces of the seal ring segments.

The barrier fluid within the groove **180** exerts a radially outward force F_{RO} and a radially inward force F_{RI} on the rotary seal ring **16**, as illustrated in FIGS. 12 and 13. Because the surface area at the outer wall **184** is greater than the surface area at the inner wall **186** of the groove **180**, these forces result in a net radially outward force F_{RO} on the rotary seal ring **16**. The groove **180** is dimensioned such that the radially outward force F_{RO} created by the barrier fluid within the groove does not generally exceed, and is indeed several orders of magnitude less than, the radially inward force F_{RI} on the rotary seal ring **16** from the O-rings **170**, **172** and from the process medium, as described in detail below. Thus, the radially outward force F_{RO} due to the barrier fluid does not separate or "blow apart" the rotary seal ring segments **150a**, **150b** of the rotary seal ring **16**.

An exemplary seal was constructed having a groove **180** dimensioned to have an axial depth of 0.068 inches and a radial width of approximately 0.25 inches. In this example, the groove was positioned approximately 0.375 inches from the inner surface **152** of the rotary seal ring **16**. This resulted in the radial width of the two rotary seal ring surfaces **20a** and **20b** being approximately 0.185 inches.

The seal of the present invention is not limited to the described and illustrated groove configurations, but can include other groove designs, such as, for example, a series of spiral grooves radially disposed between the inner surface **152** and the outer surface **156** of the rotary seal ring **16**. The spiral grooves accordingly split the rotary seal ring face **20** into the concentric seal faces **20a** and **20b** to form a dual seal. The spiral grooves can be uni-directional or bi-directional grooves. Barrier fluid within the grooves provides a primarily hydrodynamic separation force between the seal faces **18** and **20a**, **20b**. Examples of suitable spiral groove designs are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,889,348, 5,143,384 and 5,529,315, all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

With reference to FIGS. 1, 4, 10, 12 and 15, a plurality of axial bores **183** extend through the rotary seal ring segments from the groove **180** to the second annular connecting wall **164**. The bores are preferably evenly spaced apart along the circumference of the seal ring **16**. Those of ordinary skill will recognize that any number and manner of spacing can be utilized.

Barrier fluid can be introduced to outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments through the axial bores **183**. As best illustrated in FIG. 15, the O-rings **170** and **172**, the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments, and the inner surface **108** of the holder segments form, in combination therewith, a fluid-tight, pressure-tight annular chamber **185**. Barrier fluid introduced to the chamber **185** through the bore **228**, the groove **180**, and the axial bore **183** exerts a radially

inward fluid force F_{rr} on the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments (FIG. **15A**). The radially inward fluid force F_{rr} acts in combination with the radial inward force provided by O-rings **170** and **172** and the process medium to place each of the rotary segment sealing surfaces **24** into sealing contact with another segment, thereby maintaining a fluid-tight and pressure-tight seal.

The radially inward fluid force F_{rr} can be varied or adjusted by controlling and/or regulating the pressure of the barrier fluid in the chamber **185**. In this manner, the radially inward force on the rotary seal ring segments can be adjusted to compensate for changes in operating conditions within the seal. For example, a negative pressure condition, in which the pressure of the fluid at the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments drops below the pressure of the fluid at the inner surface **152** of the rotary seal ring segments, can result in separation of the rotary seal ring segments, as is described in more detail below. A negative pressure condition can also occur if the fluid pressure at the outer surface **154** drops below the pressure of the barrier fluid introduced between the seal faces **18** and **20a,b**. The phrase "negative pressure condition" is defined herein to mean any condition in which the pressure of the fluid at the outer surfaces of the seal rings and holder assembly is less than the pressure of the fluid at the inner surfaces of the seal rings and holder assembly or the pressure of the fluid introduced to the seal faces. In such a condition, the radially inward force F_{rr} can be increased to inhibit separation of the seal ring segments and thereby maintain the seal between the seal ring segment surfaces **24**.

In addition to the radially inward fluid force, the barrier fluid within chamber **185** exerts an axial fluid force F_{ra} on the rotary seal segments (FIG. **15A**). Components of the axial fluid force F_{ra} aid in maintaining O-rings **170** and **172** in their seated positions, as well as urge the seal faces of the rings toward each other. Axial fluid force component F_{ra1} biases O-ring **170** into sealing engagement with the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments and inner surface **108** of the holder segments. The axial fluid force component F_{ra1} is opposed by an axial component of the process fluid face F_{pa} on the opposite side of O-ring **170**. The O-ring **170** is free to move between surface **160** of the rotary seal ring **16** and surface **118** of the holder assembly **100**, depending on which fluid pressure force is greater. This freedom of movement is provided to facilitate pivoting of the rotary seal ring about O-ring **172**. The axial fluid force component F_{ra2} biases O-ring **172** into sealing engagement with the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments and inner surface **108** of the holder segments.

A significant advantage of the negative pressure control feature of the illustrated seal is that it allows for a single mechanical seal to operate in multiple environments. Thus, it is not necessary for the end user to stock multiple different seal types for employment in various, specific operating conditions. This reduces overall cost to the end user because they need only purchase and stock a single seal type, the split mechanical seal of the present invention, which can be adjusted to provide a fluid seal under multiple operating conditions.

Those of ordinary skill will readily recognize that the illustrated split mechanical seal **10** of the present invention need not include the rotary seal ring axial bore **183** in order for the seal to operate in its intended manner. For example, in applications in which the possibility of a negative pressure condition is unlikely, the rotary seal ring **16** can be configured without the axial bore **183** without effecting the operation and efficiency of the split mechanical seal **10**.

As shown in FIGS. **6** and **11** the stationary seal ring **14** includes a pair of arcuate seal ring segments **200a**, **200b** each identical to the other. The stationary seal ring arcuate segments **200a**, **200b** have a substantially smooth arcuate inner surface **202** extending parallel to the first axis **13** and an outer surface **204**. The stationary seal ring segment includes seal face **18** and a first outer surface **206** that extends axially therefrom, as well as a further axially extending second outer surface **208** that is stepped radially inward from the first outer surface **206**. The first outer surface **206** and the second outer surface **208** form in combination therewith a first annular connecting wall **210** that extends radially between the first and second outer surfaces. An axial extending third outer surface **212** is stepped radially inwardly from the second outer surface **208** by a second annular connecting wall **214** that extends radially between the second and third outer surfaces. The stationary seal ring **14** has a substantially smooth arcuate bottom surface **216** opposed to seal face **18**. The stationary seal rings segments **200a**, **200b** have a recess **220** formed along the bottom surface **216**. The mechanical spring clip **174**, mechanically coupled to a bottom surface **55** of the gland assembly **30**, seats in the recess **220** (FIGS. **3** and **16**). This arrangement helps align and seat the stationary seal ring **14** in the chamber **102**, as well as provide a mechanical impedance for preventing the stationary seal ring segment **14** from rotating with shaft **12** and the rotary seal ring **16**. A suitable mechanical clip is Chesterton Mechanical Seal Product No. 442, for sale by the A.W. Chesterton Co.

The inside diameter of the stationary segment inner surface **202** is greater than the shaft **12** diameter, and is greater than the diameter of the inner surface **152** of the rotary seal ring **16**, thereby allowing motion of both the shaft **12** and the rotary seal **16** relative to the stationary seal ring **14**. A plurality of elastomeric members, i.e. split O-rings **222**, **224**, and **226**, provides a radially inward biasing force sufficient to place the segment sealing surfaces **22** of the stationary seal ring segment **14** in sealing contact with the other stationary seal ring segment. Additionally, the O-rings **222**, **224**, and **226** form fluid-tight and pressure-tight seals between the gland assembly **30** and the stationary seal ring **14**. The O-rings **222**, **224** seat in the channels **48**, **46** formed in the third surface **42** of the gland assembly **30**. The O-ring **226** seats against the second surface **38** and the first annular connecting wall **40** of the gland assembly **30**. The stationary seal ring is preferably composed of a carbon or ceramic material.

With reference to FIGS. **6**, **11**, and **15**, a plurality of barrier fluid bores **228** are formed in the stationary seal ring segments **200a** and **200b**. The bores **228** include a radially extending section **230** that extends radially inwardly from the second outer surface **208** of the stationary seal ring segments and an axial section **232** that communicates with and extends from the radial section **230** to the seal face **18** of the seal ring segments. Barrier fluid from a barrier fluid reservoir, not shown, is introduced to the seal surfaces **18**, **20** of the seal rings and the groove **180** formed in the seal face **20** through the bores **228**.

One skilled in the art will recognize that the barrier fluid bores are not limited to the number or shape described and illustrated herein. For example, a single barrier fluid bore can be provided. Alternatively, it is possible to provide barrier fluid to the seal faces **18**, **20** by means other than a bore formed in the seal rings **14** and **16**. For example, the barrier fluid can be introduced to the seal faces from the outer and/or inner diameter of the seal ring segments through spiral pumping grooves or the like. In this manner,

the barrier fluid does not necessarily need to be a separate fluid supply but can be the process medium itself.

Likewise, the position and arrangement of the barrier fluid bores is not limited to those specifically disclosed herein, as alternative positions and arrangements are possible to achieve the same results. For example, the barrier fluid bores can be formed in rotary seal ring 16, as well as the stationary seal ring 14, and can extend from the seal faces to any outer surface of the seal rings. In addition, the barrier fluid bore can extend linearly from the seal faces 18, 20 to an outer surface of the seal ring.

An alternative arrangement of barrier fluid bores is shown in FIG. 6A. In addition to the barrier fluid bores 228, axial fluid bores 229 extend from the seal face 18 to the rear of the stationary seal ring 14, i.e., second annular connecting wall 214. The fluid bores 228 and the axial fluid bores 229 are alternately arranged, in one practice, about the circumference of the stationary seal ring 14. Although this configuration of barrier fluid bores is operable with a barrier gas or liquid, it is particularly suited for applications in which a barrier liquid is introduced to the seal faces 18 and 20. The axial fluid bores 229 transmit the barrier liquid from the seal face 18 to the second annular connecting wall 214 at the rear of the stationary seal ring 14. In this manner, the fluid pressure at the rear of the stationary seal ring is maintained at the fluid pressure at the seal face 18. Accordingly, this particular configuration permits the seal 10 to revert to a conventional balancing arrangement, and, thus operate as a conventional contacting face seal.

As best shown in FIG. 15, each radial section 230 of the barrier fluid bores 228 opens at the second outer surface 208 of the stationary seal ring to provide fluid communication between the bores 228 and a similar axial barrier fluid bore 234 formed in the gland assembly 30.

The bore 234 formed in the gland assembly 30 opens at one end at the outer surface 236 of the gland assembly and at the other end at a section 42b of the third surface 42 of the gland assembly 30 (FIGS. 1 and 2). The O-rings 222 and 224 are positioned in grooves 48 and 46 on either side of section 42b and provide fluid-tight and pressure-tight seals between the stationary seal ring segments 220a, 200b and the gland assembly 30. In this manner, a fluid-tight, pressure-tight annular chamber is formed between the O-rings 222, 224, section 42b of the gland assembly 30, and the second outer surface 208 of the stationary seal ring 14, to retain the barrier fluid within this channel as well as to conduct the fluid into the axial bore 228. Barrier fluid from a barrier fluid reservoir (not shown) is supplied through the gland bore 234 and the annular chamber to each of the stationary seal ring segment bores 228.

The mechanical spring clip 174, in combination with O-ring 172, functions to provide an axial force for resilient supporting the stationary and rotary seal rings 14 and 16 to bias the seal rings such that the stationary and rotating seal surfaces 18 and 20 are biased towards each other. As illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 15, the seal rings 14 and 16 are floatingly and non-rigidly supported in spaced floating relation relative to the rigid walls and faces of the gland and holder assemblies 30, 100. This floating and non-rigid support and spaced relationship permits small radial and axial floating movements of the rotary seal segments 150a, 150b and the stationary seal ring segments 200a, 200b with respect to each other, while still allowing the rotating seal face 20 to follow and to be placed into a sealing relationship with stationary seal ring face 18. Thus, the rotary and stationary seal segments 150a, b and 200a, b are self-aligning as a result of this floating action.

In addition to the mechanical biasing provided by clip springs 174, an additional fluid biasing system is provided in the seal 10 of the present invention. With reference to FIGS. 1, 11 and 15, the fluid biasing system includes a radially extending closing fluid bore 240 that is formed radially through the gland assembly 30 for introducing a closing fluid which is introduced to a rear surface, such as outer surface 204, of the stationary seal ring segments 200a, 200b to provide a closing force on the stationary and rotary seal rings 14, 16. The radially extending closing fluid bore 240 is adjacent and parallel to the barrier fluid bore 234. The closing fluid bore 240 opens at one end at the outer surface 236 of the gland assembly and at the other end at onto section 42a of the third inner gland surface 42 and the second annular connecting wall 44 of the gland assembly 30. A fluid-tight and pressure-tight annular closing fluid chamber 242 is formed between O-rings 224, 226, the outer surface 204 of the stationary seal ring segments 200a and 200b and the inner surface of the gland assembly.

As best illustrated in FIG. 15, closing fluid at a regulated pressure is provided from a closing fluid reservoir (not shown) to the closing fluid chamber 242 through closing fluid bore 240. The closing fluid can be a liquid, a gas, or a combination of both. The closing fluid exerts a fluid closing force F_{fc} on the stationary and rotary seal rings segments. The fluid closing force F_{fc} operates in combination with a mechanical spring closing force F_{sc} to bias the seal faces 18 and 20 towards one another into a sealing relationship. Preferably, the sum of the fluid closing force F_{fc} and the mechanical spring closing force F_{sc} balances the barrier fluid separation force F_A to inhibit over separation of the seal faces 18 and 20 and the potential loss of the seal, e.g., excessive fluid leakage, between seal faces 18 and 20.

The magnitude of the fluid closing force F_{fc} can be adjusted or regulated by controlling the pressure of the closing fluid within the closing fluid chamber 242. The ability to adjust the closing force on the stationary and rotary seal rings segments provides significant advantages. For instance, the magnitude of the closing force can be varied to maintain a sealing relationship between the seal faces 18 and 20 in the event of a change in operating conditions. Also, the magnitude of the fluid closing force can be adjusted to compensate for changes in mechanical spring force due to use of seal components having different tolerances. Consequently, the split mechanical seal 10 in combination with a fluid feedback system can dynamically regulate the fluid seal and/or the gap formed between the seal faces 18, 20 to control the amount of leakage during operation.

A significant advantage of the fluid biasing system is that it provides a simple integrated structure, such as fluid conduits, for externally controlling the amount of separation of the seal faces and regulating the fluid seal formed between the seal faces. Accordingly, this system can operate in combination with the separation force provided by barrier fluid introduced to the seal faces 18, 20 or independent of pressurized fluid contained within the seal 10, to adjust the degree of seal face contact. Hence, the split mechanical seal 10 can regulate or adjust the seal face separation, as well as the fluid seal formed therebetween, over a wide range of operating conditions. This increases the flexibility of the seal and allows the seal to be used in multiple environments.

One skilled in the art will recognize that the seal is not limited to the specific fluid closing system described herein and that alternative fluid closing system arrangements are possible. For example, a single fluid reservoir can be used to supply both barrier fluid to the groove and to supply closing fluid to the outer surface of the stationary seal ring.

Alternatively, the process medium can be used as the closing fluid. Furthermore, either the mechanical spring clips **174** or the closing fluid system can be used as the sole source of axial biasing force, eliminating the need for the other axial closing force.

The split mechanical seal **10** of the present invention can include a pressure feedback system (not shown) that regulates either or both of the closing pressure and the pressure of the barrier fluid supplied to the seal to maintain the desired conditions at the seal faces **18**, **20** of the seal rings **14**, **16**. The pressure control system can include pressure sensors mounted within or at the seal to monitor changes in barrier and closing fluid pressure during operation. The pressure sensors can be coupled to a controller or the like in a closed or open feedback system for adjusting the barrier and/or closing fluid pressure in response to pressure variations due to changes in operating conditions. Examples of pressure feedback systems are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 2,834,619 and U.S. Pat. No. 3,034,797, both of which are incorporated herein by reference.

Alternatively, the pressure feedback system can employ one of the system fluids, such as barrier, process or closing fluid, as a regulator fluid input and regulate either the barrier fluid pressure or closing force based on this regulated input. In doing this, the pressure feedback system can sense a change in pressure between selected fluid pressures and corrects any imbalance. The pressure feedback system accomplishes this correction by connecting the system to a high pressure fluid supply to add fluid to the system to raise the pressure therein or to vent pressure from the system when internal pressure is above a selected value.

Barrier fluid can be introduced to outer surface **204** of the stationary seal ring **14** through barrier fluid gland bore **234**, as illustrated in FIGS. **1**, **11**, and **15**. The O-rings **222** and **224**, the outer surface **204** of the stationary ring segments, and the inner surface of the gland assembly form, in combination, a fluid-tight, pressure-tight chamber **270**. Barrier fluid introduced to the chamber **270** through gland bore **234** exerts a radially inward fluid source F_{rb} on the outer surface **204** of the stationary seal ring segments. The radially inward fluid force F_{rb} acts in combination with the radial inward force provided by the O-rings **222**, **224**, and **226** and the process medium, as well as a radially inward fluid force F_{rc} provided by the closing fluid within closing fluid chamber **242**, to place each of the stationary seal ring segment sealing surfaces **22** into sealing contact with another seal segment, thereby maintaining a fluid-tight, pressure-tight seal.

In a manner analogous to the rotary seal ring, the radially inward fluid force F_{rb} can be adjusted or varied by controlling and/or regulating the pressure of the barrier fluid in the chamber **270**. Likewise, the radially inward fluid force F_{rc} can be adjusted or varied by controlling and/or regulating the pressure of the closing fluid within the closing fluid chamber **242**. In this manner, the radially inward force on the stationary seal ring segments, in addition to the rotary seal ring segments, can be adjusted for changes in operating conditions. For example, the radially inward force on the stationary seal ring segments can be increased to inhibit separation of the stationary seal ring segments during negative pressure conditions.

As generally illustrated in FIG. **14**, identical ball and socket fastening mechanisms are provided on the free ends of O-rings **128**, **170**, **172**, **222**, **224**, and **226**. At one end, the O-ring narrows into a substantially hemispherical shoulder portion **250** and, adjacent thereto, annular neck portion **252**.

Immediately adjacent neck portion **252** is substantially spherical head portion **254**. In fastening, head portion **254** is inserted into matching spherical socket portion **256** at the other end of the O-ring such that annular collar portion **258** surrounds and captures neck portion **252**, and shoulder portion **250** is in intimate contact with annular jacket portion **260**. Additionally, although seal **10** and its associated components are depicted as sectional pans, the O-rings **128**, **170**, **172**, **222**, **224**, and **226** are continuous and complete structures having the above configuration.

In assembly, the rotary seal segments **150a** and **150b** are mounted about the shaft **12** and mounted in the holder assembly **100** by aligning the alignment bore **134** of the rotary seal ring with axially extending alignment pin **132**, which extends from alignment bore **130** of the holder assembly. The O-ring **170** is concentrically disposed about the rotary seal segments **150a** and **150b** and is further placed in sealing contact with the holder second face **112**, rotary seal second outer surface **158**, and can contact either holder first wall **118** or rotary seal first wall **160**. Likewise, the O-ring **172** is concentrically disposed about the rotary seal segments **150a** and **150b** and is further placed in sealing contact with the holder fourth face **115**, the holder third wall **121**, rotary seal fourth outer surface **166**, and rotary seal third wall **168**. The O-rings **170** and **172** provide an inward radial force sufficient to place the rotary seal surfaces **24** of the seal segment **150a** into sealing contact with each of the seal surfaces **24** of the seal segment **150b**. The holder segments **34a** and **34b** are then secured together by tightening screws **146** that are positively maintained in fastener receiving apertures **144**. As shown in FIGS. **1** and **15**, the rotary seal segments **150a** and **150b** are spaced from the holder assembly inner surface **108**, and are non-rigidly supported therein by O-rings **170** and **172**, thereby permitting small radial and axial floating movements of the rotary seal ring **16**.

The stationary seal ring segments **200a** and **200b** are concentrically mounted over shaft **12** and secured together by O-rings **222**, **224**, and **226**. The O-rings **222**, **224**, and **226** provide a radially inward force to the stationary seal ring outer surface **204** sufficient to place the sealing surfaces **22** of the seal segment **200a** into sealing contact with the sealing surfaces **22** of the seal segment **200b**.

The gland segments **34a** and **34b** are concentrically placed about the holder assembly **100**, and the stationary and rotary seal rings **14** and **16**, and are secured together by screws **90** that are mounted in and positively maintained by fastener-receiving apertures **84** in the gland segments. The screw cannot be unintentionally removed from the seal **10** since they are secured to the gland assembly **30** by the inventive fastener-receiving aperture **84** and screw **90**. Additionally, mounting the screws **90** does not necessitate rotating the shaft since the screws **90** can be reached from either side of the gland assembly **30**. Alternative seal fastening means known in the art can also be used with the seal of the present invention.

Prior to fully securing the gland assembly **30** to the housing **11**, the shaft **12**, the holder assembly **100**, and the stationary and rotary seal rings **14**, **16** should be centered within the chamber **102**. Examples of suitable centering mechanisms are described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,571,268, which is assigned to the assignee hereof and is incorporated herein by reference.

When the gland assembly **30** and the holder assembly **100** are properly aligned, the gland gasket **80** and the holder gasket **142** are captured in separate gasket grooves **64**, **140**

formed on opposing seal faces of the gland and holder segments. The double capture configuration allows the seal 10 to withstand higher pressures without degradation of the pressure and fluid seals formed at the segment sealing faces. Additionally, the O-rings 222, 224, and 226 form a pressure-tight and fluid-tight seal between the gland inner surface and the outer surface 204 of the stationary seal ring 14.

After the seal 10 is assembled and mounted to the pump housing 11, the process medium is sealed within a process fluid chamber 300, as shown in FIGS. 1 and 15. The process fluid chamber is defined by the gland inner fourth surface 50 and fifth surface 54, the gland third wall 52, O-rings 170 and 222, the outer surface 106 and the first and second inner surfaces 110, 112 of the holder assembly, first outer surface 156 of the rotary seal ring 16, and the first and second outer surfaces 206, 208 and first connecting wall 210 of the stationary seal ring 14. The ambient medium, typically air, fills an ambient fluid chamber 310, typically sealed from the process chamber 300, that is defined by the stationary and rotary seal ring inner surfaces 152, 202, the fourth wall 169 of the rotary seal ring 16, the O-ring 128, and the shaft 12. The terms "ambient" and "ambient medium" are intended to include any external environment or medium other than the process environment or process medium.

The stationary and rotating segment seal surfaces 22, 24 are placed in sealing contact with the other segment of the pair by the radial force of the O-rings 170, 172, 222, 224, and 226. The pressure of the process medium within the process chamber 300 exerts an additional radial inward force, proportional to the process fluid pressure, upon the rotary seal ring segment first outer surface 156 and the stationary seal ring segment first and second outer surfaces 206, 208, biasing the segment sealing surfaces 22, 24 together.

The O-ring 128 prevents the seepage of process fluid along the shaft 12 and into the ambient fluid chamber 310. The flat gasket 60 prevents the seepage of process fluid along the housing II and the seal 10 interface. The O-rings 170, 172, 222, 224, and 226 prevent process fluid from invading the ambient fluid chamber 310 by way of the holder assembly 100 and the gland assembly 30, respectively.

In operation, barrier fluid is introduced to the groove 180 and the seal faces 18, 20a, 20b through barrier fluid bores 228 in the stationary seal ring 14. The barrier fluid exerts a primarily hydrostatic lifting force on the seal face 18, 20a, and 20b that operates to separate at least a portion of the stationary seal ring face 18 from at least a portion of the rotary seal ring faces 20a and 20b to form a gap therebetween. The barrier fluid fills the gap formed between the seal faces, thereby separating the seal faces 18 and 20 to form a fluid seal between the process medium in the process chamber 300 and the ambient fluid in the ambient fluid chamber 310. The gap is maintained at a predetermined width, or is adjustable, to minimize leakage across the seal faces while concomitantly separating the seal faces to reduce wear.

The effects of the barrier fluid on the seal 10 is twofold. First, the barrier fluid can reduce wear on the seal faces by reducing the amount of direct, frictional contact between the seal face 18 and the seal faces 20a and 20b, thus resulting in a longer life for the seal components. Second, the barrier fluid operates to transfer heat generated by the direct, frictional contact between the seal faces away from the seal faces, resulting in a more even temperature distribution throughout the seal 10 and thus prolonging the useful life of the seal components by reducing thermal stress that the components are subjected to.

Additionally, the split mechanical seal 10 of the present invention provides the requisite flexibility of being operable with different types of barrier fluids, e.g. gases or liquids or combinations thereof. This flexibility is possible because the area of direct, frictional contact between the seal faces can be controlled by adjusting the barrier fluid pressure and the closing fluid pressure, and thus the magnitude of the hydrostatic lifting force, to produce the desired separation gap. Generally, it is desirable for the separation gap to be greater in barrier gas applications than in barrier liquid applications, because of the typically better heat transfer properties of liquids compared with gases. Accordingly, in applications in which a barrier gas is preferred, the separation gap can be adjusted to the appropriate width for the selected barrier gas which will inhibit wear on the seal faces. Similarly, in applications in which a barrier liquid is preferred, the separation gap can be adjusted to the appropriate width for the selected barrier liquid which will inhibit wear on the seal faces.

The seal 10 of the present invention offers the further advantage of being a completely split mechanical seal, and preferably a split mechanical non-contacting face seal, in which a portion of each of the seal components, e.g. the gland assembly, the holder assembly, the stationary and rotary seal rings, and the O-rings, is split. This split seal design facilitates replacement or repair of damaged seal components by permitting installation and removal of the split seal components without necessitating the complete breakdown of the associated equipment, e.g., a pump or the like, and without having to pass the seal over the end of the shaft.

Furthermore, the split configuration of the split mechanical seal 10 of the present invention does not compromise the seal integrity of the seal. The inventive design of the seal 10 is such that radial fluid leakage at the seal surfaces 22, 24, 62, and 138, between each of the split segments 150, 200, 34, and 104 of the stationary and rotary seal rings, the gland assembly, and the holder assembly, respectively, is inhibited. Similarly, fluid leakage across the stationary and rotary seal faces 18, 20a and 20b is inhibited by the combination of axial closing forces applied to the seal rings which function to bias the seal faces towards each other in a sealing relationship, as well as maintain the proper alignment of the seal faces.

During normal operation, the pressure of the process medium in the process fluid chamber 300 is greater than the pressure of the ambient fluid in the ambient fluid chamber 310 (the positive pressure condition), and the process fluid exerts a radially inward force on the outer surfaces 204, 154 of the stationary and rotary seal rings, respectively, and the outer surface 106 of the holder assembly 100, as illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 15. The radially inward force exerted by the process medium assists in holding together the segments of the seal rings and the holder assembly in a fluid sealed relationship.

If the pressure of the process medium in the process fluid chamber 300 falls below the pressure of the ambient fluid in the ambient fluid chamber 310 (the negative pressure condition), the ambient fluid exerts a radially outward force on the inner surfaces 202, 152 of the stationary and rotary seal rings, respectively. If the pressure differential created during this condition is such that the radially outward force is greater the radially inward force applied by the O-rings, the seal ring segments can separate, resulting in leakage across the seal faces.

To prevent this type of leakage across the seal faces 18, 20, and seal surfaces 22, 24 in the negative pressure

condition, the radially outward force on the seal rings from the ambient fluid pressure is counter balanced by the radial inward force provided by the O-rings **222**, **224**, and **226** on the stationary seal ring segments **200a** and **200b** and by O-rings **170** and **172** on the rotary seal ring segments **150a** and **150b**, in combination with the radially inward force exerted by the barrier fluid disposed within the chamber **185** on the outer surface **154** of the rotary seal ring segments. The radially inward fluid force F_{rr} acts in combination with the radial inward force provided by O-rings **170** and **172** to maintain each of the rotary segment sealing surfaces **24** into sealing contact with the other segment during this condition, thereby maintaining a fluid-tight and pressure-tight seal.

During operation, the O-ring **172** acts a pivoting resilient member about which the rotary seal ring **16** can pivot to maintain co-planar alignment and a sealing relationship between the rotary seal ring seal face **18** and the stationary seal ring seal face **20**. Thus, coning of the seal faces is prevented and loss of the fluid seal between the seal faces inhibited. Additionally, the presence of the O-ring **172** and the pivoting ability it affords allows for the seal faces **20a** and **20b** to be radially separated to form concentric seal faces without loss of the fluid seal between seal faces **18** and **2a,b**. Accordingly, the pivoting action of the O-ring **172** provides for a resilient pivoting of the rotary seal ring **16** during full operation of the split mechanical seal **10** in both non-contacting and contacting face seal modes, while concomitantly ensuring either consistent co-planar contact between the opposed seal faces.

The fluid biasing system introduces a closing fluid to the outer surface **204** of the stationary seal ring segments **200a**, **200b** to provide a closing force on the stationary and rotary seal rings **14**, **16**. Closing fluid at a regulated pressure is provided to the closing fluid chamber **242** through closing fluid bore **240**. The closing fluid exerts a fluid closing force F_{fc} on the stationary and rotary seal rings segments. The fluid closing force F_{fc} operates in combination with a mechanical spring closing force F_{sc} to bias the seal faces **18** and **20** towards one another into a sealing relationship. During operation, the sum of the fluid closing force F_{fc} and the mechanical spring closing force F_{sc} balances the barrier fluid separation force F_A to inhibit over separation of the seal faces **18** and **20** and the potential loss of the seal, e.g., excessive fluid leakage, between seal faces **18** and **20**.

The fluid biasing system increases the flexibility of the split mechanical seal **10** and allows the seal to be used in multiple environments by providing a simple integrated structure, i.e., fluid conduits, for externally controlling the amount of separation of the seal faces and regulating the fluid seal formed between the seal faces. The system can operate in combination with the separation force provided by barrier fluid on the seal faces **18**, **20** or independent of pressurized fluid contained within the seal **10** to adjust the degree of seal face contact. Thus, the split mechanical seal **10** can regulate or adjust the seal face separation, as well as the fluid seal formed therebetween, over a wide range of operating conditions.

One skilled in the art will recognize that, although only a single seal configuration is described and illustrated herein, the seal **10** of the present invention can be used in a dual or tandem or plural seal configuration in which multiple seals **10** or seal rings are arranged axially along the shaft.

It will thus be seen that the invention efficiently attains the objects set forth above, among those made apparent from the preceding description. Since certain changes may be made in the above constructions without departing from the scope

of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the accompanying drawings be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.

It is also to be understood that the following claims are to cover all generic and specific features of the invention described herein, and all statements of the scope of the invention which, as a matter of language, might be said to fall therebetween.

Having described the invention, what is claimed as new and desired to be secured by Letters Patent is:

1. A split mechanical face seal for providing fluid sealing between a housing and a rotating shaft, said seal comprising a first seal ring having at least two seal ring segments and a radially extending first seal face,

a second seal ring having at least two seal ring segments and a radially extending second seal face, said first and second seal faces being opposed to one another,

one of said first seal ring and said second seal being connected to said rotating shaft to rotate therewith, the other of said first seal ring and said second seal being connected to said housing,

means for introducing a barrier fluid from a barrier fluid reservoir to said first seal face and said second seal face, wherein said barrier fluid is different from a fluid being sealed, and

split support means having at least two support segments for coupling said first seal ring to one of said housing and said rotating shaft.

2. The split mechanical seal according to claim 1, wherein said second seal ring is connected to said housing and said first seal ring rotates with said shaft.

3. The split mechanical seal according to claim 1, wherein said means for introducing a barrier fluid to said first and said second seal faces includes at least one axial fluid conduit formed in said first seal ring and extending from said first seal face to a rear surface of said first seal ring.

4. The split mechanical seal according to claim 1, further comprising means for introducing a closing fluid to a rear surface of said first seal ring to provide a closing force on said first seal ring, said closing force biasing said first and second sealing faces towards one another.

5. The split mechanical seal according to claim 1, further comprising means for fluidly retaining said seal ring segments of said first seal ring in a sealing relationship in a negative pressure condition.

6. A split mechanical face seal for providing fluid sealing between a housing and a rotating shaft, said seal comprising a rotary seal ring having at least two seal ring segments and a radially extending first seal face connected to said rotating shaft to rotate therewith and including an annular groove formed in the radially extending seal face;

a stationary seal ring connected to said housing having at least two seal ring segments and a radially extending second seal face, said first and second seal faces being opposed to one another,

means for introducing a fluid to said annular groove, said first seal face and said second seal face, and

split support means having at least two support segments for coupling said stationary seal ring and said rotary seal ring to one of said housing and said rotating shaft, respectively.

7. The split mechanical seal according to claim 6, wherein said groove is positioned to form two concentric seal faces on said first seal face thereby providing a dual seal between said first seal face and said second seal face.

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 6,557,856 B1
DATED : May 6, 2003
INVENTOR(S) : Henri V. Azibert et al.

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 22,
Line 20, replace "sealing" with -- seal ring --.

Signed and Sealed this

Second Day of September, 2003

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James E. Rogan", written over a horizontal line.

JAMES E. ROGAN
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office